LSTA State Grant Programs Manual

The purpose of evaluation

Evaluation is a tool, not an end in itself. IMLS believes evaluation (1) provides essential information for good decisions about priorities, deployment of resources, and program design and (2) helps communicate the value of initiatives (whether these are programs, services, or organizations– like libraries).

Choosing the "best," or even an appropriate, evaluation method depends on what you want information for. The first step in choosing a state 5-year evaluation method is deciding why to do it–meeting IMLS's demand is a poor purpose if it stands alone. Here are some good ones:

- know the extent to which goals have been met;
- know the progress that's been made towards large or long-term goals, and what's still needed;
- know the quality of programs or services (once "quality" is defined for the purpose of the evaluation)– quality can include efficiency, productivity, cost control, effectiveness, value to a community, or a variety of other values;
- know if a program warrants more resources, fewer resources, or no resources at all (should continue, expand, or cease);
- communicate the importance of a program, service, or initiative to potential users, policy makers, and/or resource allocators.

This list is not exhaustive. You may want evaluation to meet all of these needs and more. The more purposes for evaluation, the more thoughtfully it needs to be designed, and the more complex and expensive it will probably be. Few organizations can afford to cover all these bases. Your choices control scale and cost.

This table shows the four most common categories of messages about libraries with the data collection models that typically support them. In order of increasing importance to most decision-makers outside the library community, they are:

Message	Typical data collection/analysis models
How much we do	FSCS statistics, PLA statistics, inputs/outputs
How good we do it	LibQual, customer satisfaction, balanced scorecard, HAPLR scores
How much we cost/what we're worth	ROI, cost:benefit analysis
What good we do (why we matter)	**Outcomes measurement, impact assessment**

All of these messages and evaluation approaches (and others) can be valid. The *best* evaluation strategy depends on:

- the most important things that you want information to help you do or show,
- whom you want to use the information,
- how you want them to use it, and
- what you can afford or are willing to do.

Once you make those choices, identifying an evaluation approach; designing methods, instruments, and samples; and developing specs, creating an RFP, or choosing an evaluator are much, much easier.

The Why & How of the Five-Year Evaluation
George V. Smith
Presentation Given at IMLS Conference, November 2005

It's the Law
- Each State library administrative agency receiving a grant under this subtitle shall independently evaluate, and report to the Director regarding the activities assisted under this subtitle, prior to the end of the 5-Year plan.
        20 USCS § § 9134(c)

Guidelines
Five-Year Evaluation Report
- Introductory statement & summary of impact of LSTA funds to support SLAA services
- Overall report of results in achieving goals and objectives in Five-Year Plan
- Results of in-depth evaluations
- Progress in showing results of library initiatives or services
- Lessons learned
- Brief description of evaluation process

I. Introductory Statement & Impact of LSTA Funds To Support SLAA Services
- General statement on impact of LSTA funds on library services
- Discuss overall progress in delivery of library services in Five-Year Plan and importance of federal support of services

   (Maximum of 2 pages)
II. Overall Report of Results in Achieving Goals and Objectives in Five-Year Plan (1)
- Include information for each goal in Plan, including whether you surpassed, met, made progress toward, or did not work on each goal

II. Overall Report of Results in Achieving Goals and Objectives in Five-Year Plan (2)
- Format:
    A. Goal # and statement
       1. Objective/target # and statement
          a. Describe strategies, services, and
             activities used to address them
          b. Describe outputs and outcomes used to
             understand the extent they were met
          c. Describe the impact of on the quality of
             library services
       2. Repeat (ad infinitum)

III. Indepth Evaluation
- Describe methods and findings of an in-depth evaluation of at least one goal/objective/program (project) that used LSTA funds
- Try to choose a project that produced a significant advance in library service in your state

IV. Progress in Measuring Results of Library Initiatives/Services

- If you have measured outcomes or developed other objective tools or strategies for assessing the value of library services, describe your progress in using such tools.
- Use a different project from the one used in Part III

V. Lessons Learned
- Discuss programs that worked and did not work
- How could programs have been changed to improve them
- What was the value of the result achieved compared to the investment of time, money, and other resources

VI. Brief Description of Evaluation Process
- Who was involved – include all stakeholders who contributed to the evaluation
- How was the evaluation conducted – include the evaluator, methods, and timetables
- What was the cost of the evaluation – include contract amount, and value of staff time, communications, supplies, etc.

It's an Opportunity
- To evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of your programs and services
- To develop strategies for leveraging support
- To prepare for your next Five-Year Plan

GUIDELINES FOR 5-YEAR EVALUATION REPORT

I. <u>Introductory Statement and Summary of Impact of IMLS funds to Support State Library Services</u>

Provide a general statement on the impact of LSTA funds on library services in your state.   Discuss the overall progress in the delivery of library services and the importance of Federal support. (Not to exceed two pages)

II. <u>Overall report of results in achieving goals and objectives based on 5-Year Plan.</u>

In this section, include each State goal and provide the information listed for each goal and the objectives/targets of each goal.

Goal #: Include the goal statement here
State whether you surpassed your goal, met your goal, made progress toward your goal, or did not work toward this goal.

Objective/target #: Include objective statement here
- Describe the strategies, services, and activities used to address this objective/target.
- Describe the outputs and outcomes used to understand the extent to which this objective/target was met.
- Briefly describe the impact of this objective on the quality of library services and their use.

Objective/target #: Include objective statement here
- Describe the strategies, services, and activities used to address this objective/target.
- Describe the outputs and outcomes used to understand the extent to which this objective/target was met.
- Briefly describe the impact of this objective on the quality of library services and their use.

III. <u>Results of In-Depth Evaluations</u>

Describe methods and findings of an in-depth evaluation of at least one goal/objective/program/project that used IMLS funds. If possible, this initiative should be one that produced a significant advance in library service in the state.

IV. <u>Progress in showing results of library initiatives or services</u>.

Many states have begun to measure outcomes of appropriate initiatives or to develop resources for outcome-based planning and evaluation for their constituents. If you have measured outcomes or developed other objective tools or strategies for assessing the value of library services, please describe your progress here. (Please do not use the same project that you reported in Part III above.)

V. <u>Lessons Learned</u>

What lessons have you learned that other States could benefit from knowing? Include what worked and what should be changed. Include assessments that compared the level of investment of time, money and other resources to the value of the result achieved.

VI. <u>Brief description of evaluation process</u>

- Who was involved? Include stakeholders who contributed evaluation data, e.g., users of services, advisory board members, funders, policy makers, library staff, etc.
- How was the evaluation conducted? Include evaluator (e.g., contracted organization or individual or internal staff), methods, timetable, etc.
- What was the cost of the evaluation? Include contract amount, value of staff time, communications, supplies, or other resources dedicated.